

Atheists of Florida CHAPTER EVENTS

PALM BEACH: Meetings are held the third Sunday of each month at 2:30pm in Jupiter. Members are notified by postcard. For driving directions or more information, call Charles Schisler (561) 627-6340 or 624-9359.

NORTHEAST FLORIDA: No scheduled meeting for May. EMI C.W. Mitchell (904) 898-1884.

Meeting (Continued from page 1)

We have altered our membership application to include a place to contribute to either Camp Quest or the Bookfair since both projects are becoming too expensive for our treasury to support without additional help.

The Board voted to resign from the roster of the Alliance for Secular Humanism since we felt membership offered us no representation on the Alliance.

Election of officers for 1999-2000 was held with the following results:

- *Chairman of the Board:* Anthony Schleifstein
- *President:* Ed Golly
- *Vice President:* Charles Schisler
- *Secretary:* Jim Strayer
- *Treasurer:* Charles Ross

Finally, the Board decided that the President and Vice president would automatically be the representatives to the Board of the Atheist Alliance.

The three-year term of the board of directors has now expired and we are set to

TAMPA: Saturday May 29. (last Saturday of each month). 12:00 - 1:30 p.m. in meeting room B of the Clearwater East Public Library, 2251 Drew Street, Clearwater.

Monthly Dinner — The May monthly dinner will be held at Jimmy Mac's Steak and Seafood Restaurant located at 5000 Gandy Blvd. W. Tampa on May 25th from 6 to 9. If you have any questions or need directions, please contact Ed Golly—813/839-7567 or Jerry Moore—727/526-4223.

MIAMI: On May 16, the Chapter meeting will be located at the Broward County Main Library on the scenic 8th floor. The address is 100 South Andrews Ave., Ft. Lauderdale. The topic of discussion will be RELIGIOUS CLEANSING. For more information, call the Atheist Hotline at (305) 936-0210.

begin the process of electing 18 members to fill the board. No current terms will carry over, so the entire board must be elected or re-elected for another three-year term. Board membership requires attending one scheduled board meeting per year. The Board elects the officers for one-year terms. When asked to run for a position on the board, many members respond that they feel unqualified to participate. But in fact, most members are. You need only be an atheist with ideas on how to run Atheists of Florida. Board meetings usually involve reports from the committees and motions regarding activities of A of F are made, discussed and vote upon. What's the big deal? Therefore, as president, I am asking all members to give serious consideration to applying for the board.

To enter the nominations, send a short curriculum vitae, or resume about yourself and a photo if possible to our Tampa address. Deadline for submissions and nominations is May 30, 1999. We will compile all submissions into a booklet to send to all members of record as of June 1, 1999. Each booklet will contain a ballot for each member. Ballots must be returned to A of F postmarked no later than July 30, 1999 and the results announced in the newsletter. We need activist members in A of F. We hope to hear from you.

8 April/May 1999



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Atheists of Florida

Dedicated to the absolute separation of State and Church

Volume VIII
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1999



7th Annual Board of Directors Meeting

ET. PIERCE—The Atheists of Florida Board of Directors held its annual meeting on Sunday, March 29. Chairman John Xanthopoulos was unable to attend, leaving the President to stand in as chairman of the meeting. The membership of A of F now stands at 115 and the treasury had a balance of 4,505.

The Mark Twain Scholarship Fund received \$1,640 income for the year and would soon be receiving \$800.00 from the State of Florida Employees and additional funds will be contributed from the Federal Campaign Funds of Dade and Hillsborough Counties. As a result of the funding in the Twain account, we will be able to offer prizes of \$500.00 for first and second place and \$300.00 third and fourth place this year.

Atheists of Florida and the Mark Twain Scholarship Fund are the only two free-thought organizations in the nation which meet all the requirements and qualifications for the Federal Campaign Fund. Both are listed with the United Way and we are probably the only atheist organization to have achieved this status. Much of the bookwork required to accomplish this was done by Charles Ross, our treasurer.

President Golly announced that he hopes to start two new chapters in Florida this year while expanding our network with other like-minded organizations. The Miami Bookfair International generated over 60 new names for our mailing list, several of which have already joined A of F. We need to be on the lookout for similar street fairs around the state in which we can participate. This year, the fee for a stand will be \$450.00. The Board decided to ask the membership to contribute \$5.00 each to assist in the cost of participation. We will be sending a request to all members this summer and hope you will find this cause worthwhile.

Camp Quest will again be held at a YMCA (yeah, we know) camp in Ohio. Tuition for each camper has gone up from \$325 to \$495. Again this year, Atheists of Florida would like to sponsor a camper. Camp Quest is a wonderful experience for the kids who attend and really does open their minds to critical thinking.

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A of F Board Members & Officers (l-r): Christos Tzanetakos; Anthony Schleifstein, Chairman; Stephen Miles; Ed Golly, President; Celia Glantz, Atheist Hotline Coordinator; Charles Schisler, Vice President; Jim Strayer, Secretary

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Awash in legal and public relations woes, TV preacher Pat Robertson and his Christian Coalition attempted to turn the tide against them by announcing a "get out the vote" strategy for religious conservatives in advance of the 2000 elections.

Robertson is desperately trying to regain some momentum after a year of disasters, blunders and

Christian Coalition's "Get Out the Vote" project is desperate attempt to regain momentum

defeats," said Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State. "Unless he can control his radical rhetoric and get his political machine running smoothly again, Robertson risks losing his ringside seat in the Republicans' big tent."

"Robertson is a rogne elephant in the GOP china shop," added Lynn, a leading critic of the Religious Right. "Whatever happens, he's likely to break a lot of dishes." As evidence

done by his Christian Broadcasting Network, including a retroactive tax-exempt revocation for CBN for 1986 and 1987.

The Federal Election Commission's lawsuit against the Coalition for illegal partisan electioneering progressed. Documents released as a result of the trial have been embarrassing for the Coalition as they detail close ties between the Christian Coalition and the campaign operatives of incumbent candidate George Bush in the 1992 presidential election.

The Virginia Attorney General's office has also continued its investigation of Robertson for alleged unethical business practices stemming from accusations of misuse of Operation Blessing charity airplanes to benefit Robertson's for-profit diamond mining operation in the Congo.

Oklahoma State Senator Dave Herbert (D) has filed a defamation lawsuit against the Oklahoma Christian Coalition. This suit, filed in District Court of Oklahoma County, charges that the Coalition voter guide falsely reported that Herbert supports "abortion on demand," "minor's access to pornography in libraries," "increased federal control of education" and "socialized healthcare" and wants to "decriminalize sodomy and bestiality [sic]."

Robertson made Religious Right activists and Republican allies in Congress angry by abruptly calling for an end to the impeachment trial after months of demanding Clinton's removal. In September, Robertson said getting Clinton out of office was a top goal of the Coalition, dismissing resignation as too easy and demanding that he be impeached in February. He reversed course and concluded that Clinton had won.

The Christian Coalition has continued to lose visibility and movement leadership to other Religious Right figures including presidential candidate Gary Bauer and his Family Research Council, as well as James Dobson of Focus on the Family.

Robertson has no clear candidate for the 2000 presidential election. While Missouri Sen. John Ashcroft was Robertson's early favorite, his departure from the race leaves no apparent choice. Some candidates who are courted by the Religious Right appear unpalatable to Robertson, including Bauer, who is associated with a rival organization.

The Coalition suffered multiple failures in the 1998 elections, despite spending millions of dollars. Some of the group's favorite and most sympathetic candidates went down in defeat, including high-profile incumbents such as Gov. Fob James in Alabama and David Beasley in South Carolina. Churches began to turn away from the group. After an election year campaign by Americans United to educate churches on the dangers of getting caught up in the Coalition's political machine, many church leaders rejected the group's materials out of fears that the "voter guides" are too partisan and may jeopardize the church's tax exemption. *(continued on page 7)*

Anti-semitism not an issue

A FEW individuals have complained that a booklet promoting atheism which I have circulated is unfair to Judaism. In this brief mention of the Middle East situation I was accused of being anti-Semitic. I attempted to ally myself with, and defend the opinions of most objective intellectuals. My view point is endorsed by the overwhelming majority of Semites



around the world, including those who were displaced by this major upheaval—the Zionist takeover of Palestine. I am frustrated by, but empathetic for, those caught up in tribal loyalties and hates, and this principle is a major cornerstone of my philosophy as emphasized at the conclusion of many of my writings with its list of principles. Our most important ethical principle is this:

We reject arbitrary, parochial loyalties or hates based on the accidental: nationality, race, creed, class or ethnicity—rather than the essential: each individual's values. We remain considerate of others, examining long-term consequences of social action.

In my humble opinion no defender of human freedom and ethics can do better than to cherish this principle. Fifty years ago I judged that the formation of a Jewish nation in Palestine was a mistake for the

interest of the Jews, and will add great impetus to the rise of fundamentalist Muslims. History, since then has reinforced this original assessment. My writing demonstrated that the imposition of a Jewish state by a small minority—or even, were it to occur, the enforced imposition of an Atheist state by a large majority—sacrificing the legitimate interests of others—is tyrannical! Sorry, call it what you will, but this is emphatically accepted by fair-minded people.

Charles Schister

Palin Beach

New Testament Blvd?

A of F Miami-Dade Chapter Director Patrick Bens spotted a rather unusual street sign. He complained to City Hall:

Sir,

It was brought to my attention that in Miami Lakes "NEW 169 STREET" is also named "NEW TESTAMENT BOULEVARD". In a court of law, this will obviously be considered a violation of Separation of State and churches, one brand of religion being chosen over all other. To avoid that taxpayers' money being wasted on litigation, I suggest you diplomatically have the words "NEW TESTAMENT BOULEVARD" removed from the street sign in question, located about a block north of the Palmceto expressway, and Ludlum exit.

Sincerely,

Patrick Bens

Chapter Director

Dade and Broward Atheists of Florida, Inc.



Christian Coalition

(continued on page 2)

Accordingly, the Christian Coalition's chosen method of distribution for their campaign materials was severely hampered. University of Akron Prof. John C. Green and other political science scholars said that the Religious Right's electoral misfortunes were due in part to "more determined opposition" from groups such as Americans United (*Christian Century*, Dec. 23, 1998).

Robertson himself was made the subject of national public ridicule. In June, Americans United alerted the media to Robertson's announcement that Orlando may be struck by a hurricane and "possibly a meteor" after flying rainbow colored flags from city highposts during the annual "Gay Days" festivities. That was followed by AI's discovery in July that Robertson's Regent University received funds from the National Endowment for the Arts while Robertson was calling on Congress to shut down the agency.

Atheists of Florida Bookstore

Author	Title	Price
M.L. Bard	<i>The Peril of Faith</i>	\$ 5.00
Mark Twain	<i>Letters From Earth</i>	15.00
Madalyn M. O'Hair	<i>An Atheist Speaks</i>	6.00
Chapman Cohen	<i>Essays in Freethinking Vol. 1</i>	7.00
Chapman Cohen	<i>Essays in Freethinking Vol. 2</i>	7.00
Berrand Russell	<i>Why I Am Not A Christian</i>	15.00

Call Ed Golly for complete list of books & peripherals 813.839-7567. If books are to be mailed, add \$2 for first book, \$.50 each additional book. Make checks payable to Atheists of Florida.



Established eight years ago by Atheists of Florida, Inc., a non-profit, educational organization designed to heighten public awareness about atheism and to provide the religiously intimidated contacts for the membership.

Membership dues: \$15 general correspondence, \$30 life membership.
 Annual dues: \$15
 P.O. Box 3583
 Ft. Pierce, FL 34948-3583
 Phone: (385) 936-6272
 atheistsof.com

Membership dues: \$500 CA, \$250 NY, \$400 VA, \$300 WI
 Indiana
 Student (under 25 yrs): 10.00 WI
 Newsletter (out of state): 10.00 WI

Send no money, correspondence to:
 James S. Kay, Editor
 P.O. Box 3583
 Ft. Pierce, FL 34948-3583
 Phone: (813) 535-7501
 atheistsof.com

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Editor: James S. Kay
 President: Anthony J. Schellenstein
 Vice President: Ed Golly
 Secretary: Charles Sedler
 Treasurer: Charles Stricker
 C-813-835
 C-813-835
 C-813-835
 State Board of Directors: Christiana Zambrakes, Lori Katz, Steven Miles, Ed Golly
 Non-Dues: Jim Eiler
 Newsletter Editor: Steven Miles, Ed Golly

Scam artist, Peter Lowe

ACCORDING to an article in USA Today Weekend, Peter Lowe's Success 1999 is a tax-exempt charitable organization. His website is <http://www.peterlowe.com>. He runs a one-day extravaganza with big-name, big-bucks "motivational speakers." Typical was his March 18, 1999 appearance in Richmond, VA which features such luminaries as Jackie Joyner-Kersey, Tom Wolfe, Christopher Reeve, and Elizabeth Dole, as well as regulars Zig Ziglar and himself. Other speakers this spring include Gerald Ford, George and Barbara Bush, Colin Powell, William Bennett, Larry King (by satellite), Joe Montana, Lou Holtz, and even Dr. Robert Schuller.

The cheapest seat (upper level of Richmond Coliseum) is \$59. "VIP" seating and breakfast with Zig Ziglar or Jackie Joyner-Kersey is \$109. VIP seating and lunch with Tom Wolfe is \$139. VIP seating - breakfast and lunch is \$169. It is said the average attendance at one of his events is more than 12,000. So why is all this tax-exempt?

The School Board that prays together disobeys together

AN ORLANDO SENTINEL article published in late March addressed the Volusia County School Board prayer issue. The Board continues to open its sessions with a prayer. It argues that no one is required to attend School Board meetings, as students are required to attend their classes. Those who attend Board meetings aren't a captive audience, as children are in school. People can enter and leave meetings at will, and that is an important distinction.

But as the article points out, the issue isn't just a legal one. It is one of respect for the people who elect the School Board and pay its bills. As a public body, the Board represents all members of the public—no matter what their beliefs (or, in our case, lack of beliefs).

Few acts are private and personal as prayer, the article points out. What is inspirational to one person may be offensive to another. That's why school boards in Orange and Lake counties open their meetings with a moment of silence and the Seminole County School Board uses inspirational messages with no religious overtones.

Since early 1992 the Cleveland, Ohio Board of Education, which meets on public school property, has been opening its meetings with prayer, usually Christian prayer. The school board invited clergy from the area to lead the prayers.

The school board's practice was challenged that year by Sarah Coles, then an honor student at a Cleveland public high school, and Gene Tracy, a math teacher in

the district, as unconstitutional.

During a board meeting in 1992, Tracy told the board that its practice was unconstitutional. Lawrence Lumpkin, then board president answered "I want you to know, sir, that we have Christians within this organization. We have Christians that participate in the schools and I feel the moment you kick prayer out of the school, the Lord walks out of the school." Coles, who said in affidavit that she was "shocked and surprised" by the board's religious practices, joined Tracy in filing a federal lawsuit alleging the board was subverting the establishment clause of the First Amendment.

Although Tracy and Coles lost at the district level, a panel for the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled 2-1 in mid-March of this year that the board's practice of praying before every meeting was unconstitutional and therefore would need to end.

In 1966, a federal judge upheld the school board's practice. In finding for the school board, the court cited the U.S. Supreme Court's 1983 ruling in Marsh v Chambers, which upheld the Nebraska Legislature's practice of opening its sessions with prayer given by a chaplain. The high court stated in Marsh that "the opening of sessions of legislative and other deliberative public bodies with prayer is deeply embedded in the history and tradition of this country." The district court concluded, in part, that school board meetings were primarily adult gatherings, with little involvement of students.

Writing for the appeals court panel, Judge Ronald Lee Gilman said, "The fact remains that they are part of the same class as those other activities in that they take place on school property and are inextricably intertwined with the public school system." Gilman then explained why the U.S. Supreme Court always had found government-sponsored prayer in the public school setting unconstitutional: "The Supreme Court's decisions striking down religious intrusion into the public schools have dual basis. One is the fact that students are young, impressionable, and compelled to attend public schools, and the other is that public schools are particularly important to the maintenance of a democratic, pluralistic society."

Citing the high court's 1948 ruling in McCollum v. Board of Education, Gilman said that "mixing religious activity with a government institution designed to foster and educate youth in the values of a democratic, pluralistic society is troubling because of the special nature of public schools as 'the symbol of our democracy and the most pervasive means for promoting our common destiny.'" Joshua Cohen, a Cleveland attorney who represented the Ohio ACLU's challenge against the school board, lauded the appeals court ruling, saying "I honestly believe that if you care about religious freedom, this decision should be celebrated."

Thy M. Nguyen was awarded the \$300 second prize for the 1998-99 Mark Twain Essay Contest which is applied toward her tuition. She is studying Political Science and International Relations at the University of Florida.

Mark Twain Scholarship Fund

Imagine a World without National Armies

Imagine attempting to imagine a world without national armies and poses the interesting question, "What would the world be like if there were no national armies?" Would the world be safer? Less violent? Or perhaps even, more peaceful? Unfortunately, I think the answers to these questions could not be confidently placed on a resounding 'yes'.

To me, it is not the armies of the world that I necessarily fear most, but rather the doctrines that serve as part of the foundation to building these armies. Whether a nation is considered 'extreme', 'radical', or a 'world superpower', what is of most importance is how that particular nation is influenced in its views on issues relevant to its own survival and coexistence with fellow nations. If a nation demonstrates its 'extreme' or 'radical' ideology by acting as an aggressor to another nation and/or a violator of human rights, then the true threat is not the army that attacks, it is the belief and value system harbored by the men or women responsible for the direction and vision of that nation's armed forces. To further complicate matters, what one individual considers 'radical' or 'extreme' may not be viewed as such by others. For example, most Iraqis believe the United States' government to be an aggressor and violator of international peace, while many Americans call the United States a 'world superpower' and a champion of human rights and democracy. Who is right? As I was once told, the answer to this question and many others lies somewhere in the middle.

The armies of the world carry out the missions of their respective countries and pose a great physical threat to the safety of the planet's citizens everywhere, but it is the ideology that allows for their emergence and fosters their growth that is of the greatest concern to all who are committed to attaining peace. National armies and political administrations are ephemeral entities, they change or disappear entirely over time. Because of this, when one seeks to find solutions to the ills of the world, it may be most effective in the long run to look at *what* causes the reoccurrence of a particular situation rather than *whom* ever happens to be

carrying out the actual deeds at the time, however, it is too often true that the 'who' in a situation is more than not inextricably tied in with the 'what'.

To illustrate this point, consider the recent activities between the two countries that seem to be constantly and consistently immersed in the media: the United States and Iraq. The air strikes on Iraq as of late, regardless of what personal view one may hold about them, demonstrates soldiers bringing to fruition their plans of action conjured up by various high-level authorities and the value-system they hold. At this particular juncture in foreign affairs the United States' leadership believed military action to be their only avenue for rectifying an international injustice, and, as a result, their armed forces (along with Great Britain) carried out air strikes against Iraq. The United States' armed forces executed the wishes of its leaders, but it, in and of itself, would not pose a threat to Iraq (or any other country for that matter) because, as an entity without a person or administration's political ideology, it would lack purpose and direction and consequently render itself futile. So even if there were no physical United States armed forces, the threat to Iraq would not cease because the political ideology responsible for the order for military action may very well exist, and continue to exist, long after the resources for a physical armed forces of any sort may be gone.

I suppose I think of national armies as being comparable to the individuals responsible for administering capital punishment sentences to convicted inmates on Death Row. The executioners themselves are not the real threat though they physically carry out a sentence, it is the legal system of their state and nation that calls for the necessity of their existence, they are merely paid employees (as soldiers are) carrying out the orders of a person/ideology entity much larger than themselves.

If peace is what we seek to pursue as a nation, and as citizens of the world, it may only be found through *virtuosity* and *reciprocity* of gestures and deeds. If two entities commit to communicating honestly, humbly, and with the same goal at hand, there should be no reason why dialogue can't be the most potent weapon in any nation's arsenal against international injustice. If this is truly achieved, then there may be no need for national armies, no need for political ideologies of distrust and self-advancement, no need to believe that taking care of one's neighbor and of oneself as mutually exclusive objectives, as has been said, an aggression on the human rights of any one man is an attack on the human rights of all men. When an individual is able to trust his/her neighbor and speak to them honestly, only then can they begin to build a relationship, and perhaps even a community, on those virtues. And if those virtues remain in the face of disagreements or encounters with the daily challenges of life, then we just might progress a little closer to being citizens of the world, not just one nation.

With Republicans at the helm of all three branches of the legislative government, Florida appears to be headed to become the nation's first full-fledged theocracy.

Bush Steering Florida Toward Theocracy

TALLAHASSEE—Fragile as they would be for Florida's public schools, vouchers are only one of the several issues in the legislature which are aimed at converting the state into an official Christian theocracy. Also on the platter are: School prayer, abortion controls, including license plates proclaiming "Choose Life" and even a law allowing the posting of the Ten Commandments in any public building and public school classroom.

As the voucher (stealth-labeled "opportunity scholarships") bill develops, the contradictions included make it very plain to see that the issue has nothing at all to do with the quality of education received by a student. At issue is the singular concern of pumping huge quantities of public tax dollars into the coffers of the Catholic Church. The plan works like this: Public schools will be rated by a testing system of the students. Currently, only four schools in the state would fail the test. Students in those schools would be eligible to receive a voucher of \$3,500 to \$5,000 to transfer into a private (read: Catholic) school. The catch is that the testing standards will continuously be raised until a large percentage of public schools will eventually be rated as failures. And if not, parents of children in those schools will scream "discrimination" and so the legislature will allow vouchers for all parents who want them. "Choice" will become the operative word here, considered to be the "American Way."

But what about those private schools? They will not be tested in any way. And their teachers need not be certified. "We don't want to turn private schools into public schools." Lt. Gov. Frank Brogan said recently responding to questions about why he and Gov. Jeb Bush oppose rating private schools with the A through F grades they intend to impose on public schools. Damn right they don't. They do *not* want those private schools teaching nonsense like evolution, sex education, or "liberal values." They want them indoctrinated into the religion of the school all at public

Please call the Governor's Office using the special toll free number 1-877-WESAY-NO (1-877-937-2966) or write at: Gov. Jeb Bush, Florida State Capitol, Tallahassee, FL 32301

expense. But how do they circumnavigate the sticky issue of state/church separation by dumping millions of tax dollars into church coffers? Simple. The voucher money will be issued directly to the parents, not the schools. However, with private tuition typically exceeding the amount of the voucher, how will low-income parents make up the difference? They won't. Which makes it a perfect set-up for legalizing discrimination. Families with sufficient income will be able to enroll their children in private schools, but the poor will need to consider that if they accept the voucher money, their income may rise to the point where they must sacrifice public assistance. This will convert the public schools into the dumping ground of the low-income students. "The bottom line is there's nothing in the House bill that guarantees a child wouldn't be moving from an F public school to an F private school," said Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz. Dave Sid Goetz, President of the Tampa Bay Chapter of Americans United, wrote:

The recall that our Florida voters overwhelmingly approved a Constitutional Amendment in November last year which states:

"Adequate provision shall be made by law for a uniform, efficient, safe, secure and high quality system of free public schools. . . . How can this very clear mandate be converted into the diversion of public funds from free public schools to vouchers needed to pay for private and religious school education?"

Also, since some 85% of Florida's non-public schools are religious schools affiliated with some religious sectarian denomination, how can our legislature square the proposed "opportunity scholarships" to be paid out of the state treasury, with Section 3 of our Florida State Constitution which provides: "No revenue of the state or any political subdivision or agency thereof shall ever be taken from the public treasury directly or indirectly in aid of any church, sect, or religious denomination or in aid of any sectarian institution."

Under our Republican form of government, elected representatives may vote their consciences on pending legislation even when that might contravene the will of their constituents, but when the will of all the people is expressed in the Constitution of our State, a contrary vote is the equivalent of spitting in the face of Florida voters.

The price of opposition

Raffle Update

The winner of the Atheists of Florida raffle will be drawn at the Tampa Bay Chapter Meeting on Saturday, May 29th. Winner need not be present to win.
For more information contact Ed Golly at 813 839-7567

Teachers' unions cranked up a radio ad campaign slamming the plan and its sponsor, Gov. Jeb Bush.

"Hear that?" asks the announcer of a union-backed ad, words offset by sounds of shattering glass. "It's a familiar sound in Tallahassee these days. It's the sound of another campaign promise being broken."

The ad offers listeners a toll free telephone number to call to register an opinion: 1-877-WESAY-NO. It rings inside the governor's office.

Some would argue, however, that the plan is faithful to a proposal Bush made in his campaign for governor. Grade all the public schools, and let the children in "failing" schools switch to better public schools or private schools with state-paid tuition.

"The governor's position is clear, and calls generated by this [ad] are not going to change his mind," said Cori Tilley, the governor's director of communications. "This is just a scare tactic to try to protect the establishment."

The new union ad is misleading, says Randy Lewis, publicist for Floridians for School Choice, which draws some of its money from CEO America, a voucher-advocacy group supported by Wal-Mart heir John Walton.

Between choruses of breaking glass, the ad's narrator states: "Remember candidate Bush's promise? To improve our public schools, to work with communities and really listen. Well, he hasn't been listening to most Floridians. He's busy steamrolling a private school voucher bill through the Legislature that will rob our public schools of millions of tax dollars."

On April 13th several Republicans broke rank to modify a key element of the governor's A-Plan. If the Senate Amendment holds, then only failing students at failing schools, not ALL students at failing schools, will be eligible for vouchers. The importance of this vote is perhaps long-term. The drive to provide ALL students in the state with vouchers within the next five years may be more difficult than the proponents envision. Let's hope so.

Prayer is not yet dead in the schools

Not content to degenerate the public school system, a group of 20 Republican legislators has revived school prayer proposals since they no longer face a certain veto as they did with Gov. Lawton Chiles three years ago. Bush has sent signals he is favorable to a school prayer bill provided it is voluntary and student led. The new proposal seems structured to accommodate him.

Vatican Warns of Theory of Sexual Equality

The Vatican warned in March that the world is facing a "crisis in faith" provoked in part by the feminist doctrine that men and women are absolute equals. The warning was contained in a "Final Declaration" from a meeting between Australian bishops and the heads of six key Vatican departments including the powerful Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith.

The meeting, at the Vatican Nov. 17-20, focused on the situation in Australia, where Catholicism is the largest Christian faith. But the document said that "many of the issues discussed are problems that are found in other parts of the church throughout the world as well."

The document said the crisis goes to the very heart of Christian belief. Cardinal Pio Laghi, head of the Congregation for Catholic Education and former papal nuncio to the United States, told a news conference that the "delicate points" the prelates discussed included feminist inspired demands for gender inclusive language.

HB 1773 reads as follows:

Section 1: Any district school board is authorized to allow the use of a brief opening or closing message, or both, at any secondary school-related sporting event or noncompulsory student assembly including, but not limited to graduation. Such message may not exceed 2 minutes in length and may include but is not limited to, an invocation, prayer, poetry, or inspirational thought. If the participating student body chooses to use such a message:

1. The message must be given by a student volunteer, chosen by the participating student body.
2. The content of the message must be prepared by the student volunteer and shall not be monitored or otherwise reviewed by the district school board, its officers, or its employees.

The purpose of this act is to allow the students to participate and direct their own message without monitoring or review by school officials. Sure. We all realize the stealth purpose of the act is simply to get prayer into the public school system so it can then become "traditional" and expand into structured prayer every morning.

When this writer attended high school he was a member of the school band. Attendance at all home football games was mandatory, as well as the graduation ceremonies since we played the music. How would such a conflict been resolved if a prayer was planned and a band member found it offensive?

Have you voiced your opinion on these issues yet? In the beginning of April 2, 902 people had written letters to the governor opposing vouchers. Another 2,374 called to express their opposition. In contrast, 46 people had written in support of vouchers, and 576 had called.

The document said inclusive language could undermine basic Christian beliefs.

"Generally throughout the world, there is evidence of a weakening of faith in Christ, as well as a distortion of some of the doctrines based on the Scriptures and the early councils of the church," it said.

"Indeed, some aspects of feminist scholarship can lead to a rejection of the privileged place given to the scriptural language describing the Trinity and to Jesus' own teaching, and can lead to rejection of the Trinity. . . . By scripping the Christian belief that the sexes serve to complement each other, feminism has contributed to a permissiveness that has created 'great problems for Christian morality: indifference to the poor, racial prejudice and violence, abortion, Euthanasia, the legitimization of homosexual relationships and other immoral forms of sexual activity,'" it said.